

WASHINGTON – Today, the Committee on House Administration, led by Chairman Robert Brady, D-Pa., and Ranking Republican Vernon Ehlers, R-Mich., heard from Representatives, election officials, and voting experts expressing grave concern over the failing military voting procedures.

According to a September 2007 Election Assistance Commission (EAC) report on uniformed and overseas absentee voting, over 70% of the absentee ballots sent to uniformed and overseas citizen voters were rejected because they were undeliverable, and 23% were rejected by election officials because they were returned after the deadlines stipulated by state law. In his testimony before the Committee, Kimball Brace, President of Election Data Services, noted that 26 states reported undeliverable ballots as the largest impediment for military and overseas ballots in 2006. Brace testified that domestic voters, unlike overseas military voters, have the advantage of mail forwarding services provided by the US Postal Service. “Six months from when a person moves their mail is forwarded to their new address,” Brace noted. “Voters abroad, especially military voters, however do not appear to have that luxury.”

Alabama’s Secretary of State, Beth Chapman, also expressed concern with the inadequacies of current military voting procedures. According to Chapman, election officials must utilize modern technologies to expedite and secure voting procedures for military personnel. “They fight on someone else’s soil so we can freely live on our own,” Chapman said. “Since we place them in a unique situation, they should have a unique voting opportunity that is not necessarily available to others.”

The Ranking Republican of the Committee on House Administration’s Elections Subcommittee, Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., testified before his colleagues in support of his legislation, the Military Voting Protection Act (MVP Act). McCarthy introduced the MVP Act to address the 23% of ballots rejected because of untimely delivery. If passed, McCarthy’s bill would ensure military personnel serving this country are not erroneously left out of the election process by directing the Secretary of Defense to collect the absentee ballots of overseas military voters, and deliver the ballots to state election officials via air transport with tracking capabilities. McCarthy acknowledged that his legislation addressed only a portion of the problem citing that it was, “one problem that could possibly be addressed quickly.” However, McCarthy also indicated that he plans to continue working with involved parties to address the 70% of undeliverable ballots. “This bill is by no means a comprehensive solution to assuring our military servicemen and women that their votes will count,” McCarthy stated. “However, I believe it is a good first step that we can build upon in a bipartisan fashion, so that our heroes abroad can participate in this year’s historic presidential election, and Federal elections thereafter.”

For more information, please contact the Committee press office at (202) 225-8281.